2025 ECONOMIC REPORT
CENTRAL REGION

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION & WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

The Central Region is comprised of 19 counties in the center of Missouri. This region is home to several cities including Columbia, Mexico, Rolla, Camdenton, Lebanon, and the state capital, Jefferson City.

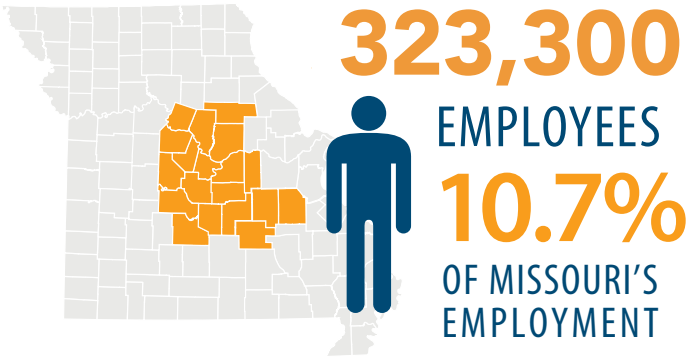
The Central Region workforce had more than 323,300 employees in 2024, making up 10.7 percent of Missouri's employment. In 2024, about 50.3 percent of the workforce was female and 49.7 percent was male, while the Missouri average was 50.1 percent female and 49.9 percent male workers in the workforce. The regional average unemployment rate in 2024 was 3.5 percent, compared to 3.7 percent for Missouri and 4.0 percent for the nation.

The workforce is getting older in the Central Region, a trend continuing throughout Missouri and the U.S. In 2024, 23.0 percent of the workforce was age 55 or older, up from 19 percent a decade earlier. It was 23.5 percent for Missouri and 24.1 percent for the nation.

For the region, 12.0 percent of the workforce was non-white and 3.8 percent was Hispanic or Latino. This compares to the state averages of 18.1 percent non-white and 5.1 percent Hispanic or Latino.

In the Central Region, 6.6 percent of the region's population (ages 18 to 64) speaks a language other than English at home. By comparison, Missouri was at 7.4 percent and the U.S. was at 23.8 percent.

The Central Region has a slightly higher percentage of the population with a disability compared to the state and nation. For the Central Region, 14.1 percent of the population has a disability compared to 12.6 percent in Missouri and 10.7 percent in the U.S.



323,300
EMPLOYEES
10.7%
OF MISSOURI'S EMPLOYMENT

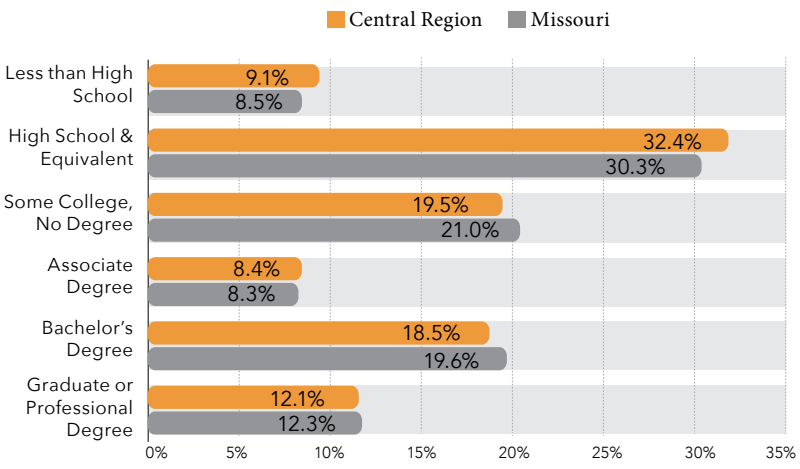
Workforce Demographics

	Central Region	Missouri	United States
Average Monthly Employment in 2024	323,329	3,016,886	161,346,000
Average Unemployment Rate in 2024	3.5%	3.7%	4.0%
Male	49.7%	49.9%	51.2%
Female	50.3%	50.1%	48.8%
Non-White	12.0%	18.1%	24.9%
Hispanic or Latino	3.8%	5.1%	18.3%
Ages 55 and Older	23.0%	23.5%	24.1%
With Disabilities (Ages 18-64)	14.1%	12.6%	10.7%
Below Poverty Levels (Ages 18-64)	15.0%	12.1%	11.6%
Language other than English (Ages 18-64)	6.6%	7.4%	23.8%
Education of Associate Degree or Higher (25 years & Older)	39.0%	40.2%	43.8%
Veterans (Age 18-64)	5.3%	4.7%	4.2%

SOURCE: QWI 2024 Q1; PRIVATE OWNERSHIP. CENSUS 2023 ACS 5 YEARS DATA, LAUS 2024 DATA

Educational attainment rates for the Central Region are slightly behind those of the state in regard to bachelor's or advanced degrees. About 39 percent of the region's population, age 25 and older, has an associate, bachelor's, or advanced degree compared to 40.2 percent for the state, and 43.8 percent for the nation. About 9.1 percent of the region's population age 25 and older has less than high school education.

Educational Attainment



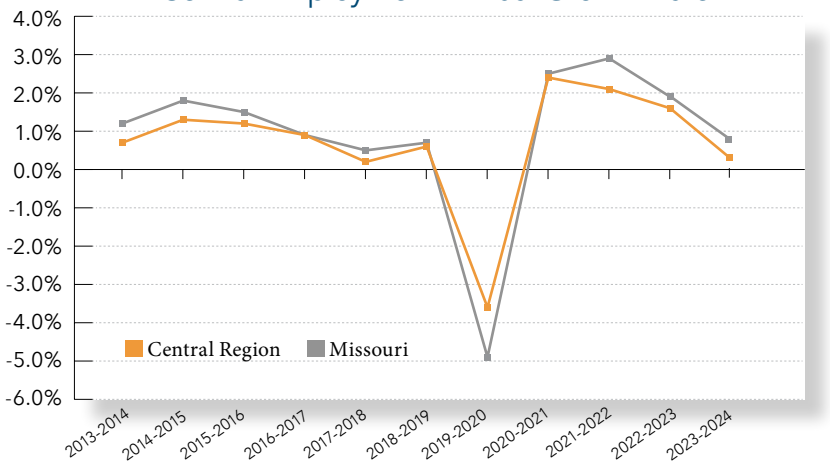
SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, ACS 2023 5 YEAR ESTIMATES

CENTRAL REGION

INDUSTRY ANALYSIS

The Central Region averaged more than 290,100 jobs in 2024. The region gained 0.2 percent employment from 2023 to 2024. Missouri employment increased by 0.8 percent in 2024. From 2020 to 2024, the Central Region averaged 1.3 percent compound annual growth for an overall gain of 6.5 percent. During that same period (2020-2024) Missouri's compound annual employment gain was 1.6 percent for an overall gain of 8.3 percent.

Central Employment Annual Growth Rate



SOURCE: BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, QCEW

Health Care and Social Assistance was the largest industry sector in the Central Region, with over 47,000 jobs in 2024. The industry added 4,933 jobs at a compound annual growth rate of 2.2 percent since 2020. The *Retail Trade* industry continues to be one of the largest employing industries in the region with over 34,000 jobs in 2024, a gain of over 2,800 jobs since 2020.

Educational Services is another large industry with over 35,400 jobs in 2024, an increase of over 5,900 jobs since 2020. *Accommodation and Food Services* gained over 5,000 jobs at a compound annual rate of 4.1 percent from 2020 to 2024, and in the same period *Manufacturing* added 816 jobs at a rate of 0.6 percent.

Central Region Top Employing Industries

	Employment 2020	Employment 2024	Net Change	2020-2024 CAGR	2023 Annual Wages
Health Care and Social Assistance	42,448	47,381	4,933	2.2%	$60,900
Educational Services	29,535	35,468	5,933	3.7%	$58,044
Retail Trade	31,134	34,011	2,877	1.8%	$37,620
Accommodation and Food Services	23,072	28,168	5,096	4.1%	$24,420
Manufacturing	26,300	27,116	816	0.6%	$56,748
Public Administration	25,562	26,769	1,207	0.9%	$53,520
Construction	12,912	14,959	2,047	3.0%	$64,632
Finance and Insurance	10,973	11,946	973	1.7%	$71,424
Administrative and Support and Waste Management and Remediation Services	9,567	10,659	1,092	2.2%	$44,292
Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services	8,561	9,750	1,189	2.6%	$70,188
Transportation and Warehousing	7,501	8,777	1,276	3.2%	$45,972
Wholesale Trade	7,686	8,003	317	0.8%	$72,732
Other Services (except Public Administration)	6,412	7,224	812	2.4%	$45,876
Management of Companies and Enterprises	4,868	4,634	-234	-1.0%	$77,856
Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation	3,580	4,232	652	3.4%	$30,000
Information	3,487	3,507	20	0.1%	$62,880
Real Estate and Rental and Leasing	2,901	3,128	227	1.5%	$49,524
Utilities	2,573	3,018	445	3.2%	$103,080
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting	1,131	1,536	405	6.3%	$42,924
Mining, Quarrying, and Oil and Gas Extraction	597	593	-4	-0.1%	$74,808

SOURCE: LEHD QWI, 2020-2024 QUARTER 2 DATA, LEHD QWI 2023 ANNUAL AVERAGE FOR WAGES. ALL OWNERSHIP

LOCATION QUOTIENT

To understand the major industries within a region, an analysis of industry concentration or clustering can be useful. The Location Quotient (LQ) describes the concentration of an industry in a geographic region, in relation to the nation, with 1.0 being the national average. Industries with higher than 1.0 LQ indicate a concentration.

The Central Region has higher concentrations in *Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers*; *Credit Intermediation and Related Activities; Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, Book, and Miscellaneous Retailers; General Merchandise Retailers;* and *Building Material and Garden Equipment and Suppliers.*

HIGHEST 2024

LQ 2.1

GASOLINE STATIONS AND FUEL DEALERS

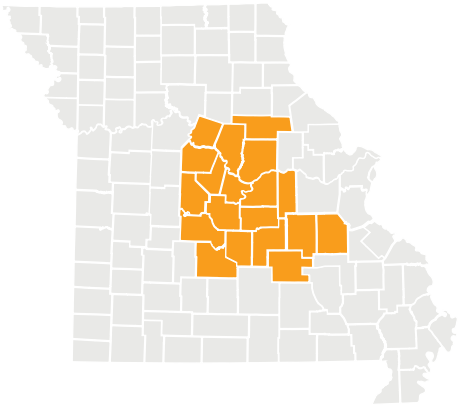
2024 Central Region Location Quotients

Industry	Employment	Location Quotient
Gasoline Stations and Fuel Dealers	4,112	2.1
Credit Intermediation and Related Activities	7,760	1.6
Sporting Goods, Hobby, Musical Instrument, , Book, and Miscellaneous Retailers	4,397	1.6
General Merchandise Retailers	8,523	1.4
Building Material and Garden Equipment	3,538	1.4
Motor Vehicle and Parts Dealers	4,992	1.3
Animal Production and Aquaculture	590	1.2
Transit and Ground Passenger Transportation	968	1.1
Wood Product Manufacturing	838	1.1
Food Services and Drinking Places	24,753	1.1
Printing and Related Support Activities	721	1.1
Nonmetallic Mineral Product Manufacturing	830	1.1
Nursing and Residential Care Facilities	6,489	1.0
Accommodation	3,733	1.0
Repair and Maintenance	2,716	1.0

SOURCE: U.S. BUREAU OF LABOR STATISTICS, QUARTERLY CENSUS OF EMPLOYMENT AND WAGES, 2024

CENTRAL REGION

Projected growth in industries helps to identify future employment needs for an area. Projections indicate that the largest industry growth in the Central Region between 2022-2032 will be in *Educational Services; Food Services and Drinking Places; Administrative and Support Services; Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals; Management of Companies and Enterprises;* and *Ambulatory Health Care Services.*



Central Region Largest Growth Industries 2022-2032

	Employment 2022	Employment 2032	Change 2022-2032 Numeric	Change 2022-2032 Percent
Educational Services	31,763	34,447	**2,684**	8.5%
Food Services and Drinking Places	25,231	27,023	**1,792**	7.1%
Administrative and Support Services	8,717	10,175	**1,458**	16.7%
Local Government, Excluding Education and Hospitals	11,099	12,172	**1,073**	9.7%
Management of Companies and Enterprises	4,208	5,190	**982**	23.3%
Ambulatory Health Care Services	10,524	11,444	**920**	8.7%
Credit Intermediation and Related Activities	8,569	9,433	**864**	10.1%
Social Assistance	7,577	8,373	**796**	10.5%
Computer and Electronic Product Manufacturing	1,326	2,112	**786**	59.3%
Hospitals	16,104	16,850	**746**	0.0%

SOURCE: MERIC INDUSTRY PROJECTIONS, 2022-2032

PROJECTED GROWTH BY INDUSTRY HELPS TO IDENTIFY FUTURE EMPLOYMENT NEEDS FOR AN AREA.

OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS

MERIC produces occupational projections that estimates labor demand over a 10-year period. The current projections cycle projected industry and occupation employment from 2022-2032. MERIC categorizes these occupations using its Now-Next-Later method to help job seekers understand the training, education, and experience requirements for various occupations.

NOW jobs typically require short-term on-the-job training, little to no experience, and/or a high school diploma. **Now** occupations with the most projected annual openings are *Cashiers; Waiters and Waitresses;* and *Home Health and Personal Care Aides. Amusement and Recreation Attendants; Loan Interviewers and Clerks;* and *Tellers* are projected to be the fastest growing **Now** occupations over the next decade.

NEXT jobs typically require a non-degree certificate, associate degree, apprenticeship, some experience, or moderate- to long-term training. *Cooks, Restaurant; Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators;* and *Nursing Assistants* are projected to have the most openings for the **Next** category of occupations. *Logging Equipment Operators; Production Workers, All Other*; and *Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and Finishers* are projected to be the fastest growing **Next** occupations.

LATER jobs typically require a bachelor's degree or higher. For **Later** occupations, *General and Operations Managers; Registered Nurses;* and *Teaching Assistants, Postsecondary* are projected to have the most openings. *Loan Officers; Substitute Teachers, Short-Term;* and *Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/ Technical Education* are the fastest growing **Later** occupations.

Central Region Fastest Growing Occupations

NOW

- *Amusement and Recreation Atendants*
- *Loan Interviewers and Clerks*
- *Tellers*
- *Packers and Packagers, Hand*
- *Landscaping and Groundskeeping Workers*

NEXT

- *Logging Equipment Operators*
- *Production Workers, All Other*
- *Electrical, Electronic, and Electromechanical Assemblers, Except Coil Winders, Tapers, and Finishers*
- *Medical Secretaries and Administrative Assistants*
- *Preschool Teachers, Except Special Education*

LATER

- *Loan Officers*
- *Substitute Teachers, Short-Term*
- *Middle School Teachers, Except Special and Career/ Technical Education*
- *Health Specialties Teachers, Postsecondary*
- *Secondary School Teachers, Except Special and Career/Technical Education*

SOURCE: MERIC OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS, 2022-2032

NOTE: OCCUPATIONS WITH ANNUAL TOTAL OPENINGS OF LESS THAN 50 ARE OMITTED

CENTRAL REGION

CENTRAL REGION LONG-TERM OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS BY TOP OPENINGS

OCCUPATION TITLE	2022 Estimated Employment	2032 Projected Employment	Annual Growth Openings	Annual Exits	Annual Transfers	Annual Total Openings	Median Wages
NOW OCCUPATIONS							
Cashiers	8,553	8,459	-9	818	824	**1,633**	$27,403
★ *Waiters and Waitresses*	5,078	5,451	37	453	636	**1,126**	$29,217
★ *Home Health and Personal Care Aides*	6,829	7,406	58	569	475	**1,102**	$28,891
Stockers and Order Fillers	6,079	6,231	15	383	603	**1,001**	$32,056
★ *Retail Salespersons*	6,689	6,546	-14	434	524	**944**	$30,053
NEXT OCCUPATIONS							
Cooks, Restaurant	3,480	3,731	25	246	294	**565**	$30,293
Miscellaneous Assemblers and Fabricators	4,791	4,966	18	207	308	**533**	$39,446
★ *Nursing Assistants*	3,377	3,591	21	220	273	**514**	$35,879
★ *Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers*	4,116	4,093	-2	186	240	**424**	$47,106
First-Line Supervisors of Food Preparation and Serving Workers	2,503	2,667	16	130	248	**394**	$35,292
LATER OCCUPATIONS							
★ *General and Operations Managers*	9,517	9,705	19	239	516	**774**	$66,769
★ *Registered Nurses*	6,896	7,269	37	235	146	**418**	$73,759
Teaching Assistants, Postsecondary	2,204	2,392	19	131	136	**286**	$31,318
Elementary School Teachers, Except Special Education	3,631	3,939	31	127	124	**282**	$46,949
Managers, All Other	2,927	2,932	0	89	122	**211**	$80,993

SOURCE: MERIC OCCUPATIONAL PROJECTIONS, 2022-2032 ★ *DENOTES OCCUPATIONS IN THE TOP TEN ONLINE JOB ADS FOR MAY 2023- APRIL 2024 IN THE REGION AND WITHIN THE NOW-NEXT-LATER CLASSIFICATION*

ONLINE JOB POSTINGS

Job postings are an indicator of demand and opportunities in an area and can assist individuals seeking job opportunities in current in-demand occupations. According to information based on online job posting data collected and aggregated from May 1, 2024 to April 30, 2025 by Lightcast™ for the Central Region, jobs like *Registered Nurses, Retail Salespersons*, and *First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers* topped the number of online job postings in the region.

OCCUPATION TITLE	ONLINE JOB POSTINGS
NOW OCCUPATIONS	
Retail Salespersons	2,310
Customer Service Representatives	1,400
Home Health and Personal Care Aides	1,220
Secretaries and Administrative Assistants	920
Merchandise Displayers and Window Trimmers	800
NEXT OCCUPATIONS	
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	1,660
Heavy and Tractor-Trailer Truck Drivers	1,500
Sales Representatives, Wholesale and Manufacturing	1,230
Licensed Practical and Licensed Vocational Nurses	1,090
Maintenance and Repair Workers, General	860
LATER OCCUPATIONS	
Registered Nurses	5,440
Software Developers	1,350
Computer Occupations, All Other	1,120
Medical and Health Services Managers	1,080
General and Operations Managers	980

SOURCE: LIGHTCAST™, ONLINE JOB ADS FROM MAY 1, 2024 - APRIL 30, 2025